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ABSTRACT

Tom Metzger and his white supremacist movement, the White Aryan Resistance, attempt to build support with working class whites and youth to create white working class solidarity and racial separation. Metzger uses videotapes as one of the methods of bringing his racist and conspiratorial message to his audience. One such vehicle is "Race and Reason," his long-running show (created specifically to be shown on public access cable channels) dedicated to the purity of the White race. Metzger claims that a conspiracy controls the media, that he is denied access to the media, and that access to the media equals control of the listeners. This "repression" then is used to justify the movement's small following, to solidify support, and to justify violence. In Kansas City (Missouri), an application to place "Race and Reason" on the public access channel was met with considerable and protracted controversy and back-and-forth maneuvering, both in and out of the courts. (Fourteen references are attached.) (SR)

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Media Access and the Radical Right:
Public Access to "Race and Reason"

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Abstract

Tom Metzger and the White Aryan Resistance created a television talk show titled "Race and Reason" for the purpose of reaching a new audience via public access channels of the cable television systems. This paper describes the purposes of the program, the resistance to its distribution, and the implications of that resistance for the racialist movement. The study concludes that since the radical right's attempts to gain media access will meet resistance, the radical right will argue that this resistance "proves" that a conspiracy controls the media; that the radical right's small following is attributable to its lack of media access; and, furthermore, that limited media access justifies the radical right's affinity for violence.

Tom Metzger proudly calls himself a racist. He accepts the "racist" adjective and denies the current rhetoric and programs of "equality". He stands for the white race, and makes his decisions on the basis of what is good for the white race. While he doesn't necessarily argue for white superiority, he argues for the separation of the races.

He calls his movement the White Aryan Resistance, and bills it as a group supporting the white working class. He argues that the middle and upper classes can be racialists simply by moving away from integrated areas and living behind locked doors guarded by fences, gates, and private guards. But the working classes, he says, must live in integrated areas with the crime, unemployment, and education problems that the wealthy can evade. Metzger attempts to build support with working class whites and Aryan youth to create white working class solidarity and eventually racial separation. According to Zeskind (1987), "Metzger and his organization White Aryan Resistance (WAR), are emerging as the leadership of the far-right movement in the U.S. (p. 1)."

Even though he is emerging as one of the far right

leaders, he may have limited potential. Bennett (1988) argues that nativist movements, like Metzger's, which argue for a return to the "original" America have been on the decline since the Second World War. ("Original" America is usually interpreted as a white, protestant, northern European America.) Bennett argues that during the 1950's, the far right began to battle "alien ideas", i.e., Communism, rather than "alien races" such as blacks, Jews, Asians or other racial groups. As such, Metzger and the White Aryan Resistance, are a throwback to earlier movements, rather than a current movement with many vocal, sympathetic adherents in present day America. However, Bennett states, "there will always be a party of fear, offering a haven to those who fear that sinister enemies threaten the nation and its way of life, proposing solutions which its adversaries fear will undermine democratic institutions (p. 408)." Even though nativist arguments like Metzger's have been on the decline since the 1950's and do not have much potency in the 90's, they still are an undercurrent in the political life of America and have the potential to be resurrected in our current social system.

Metzger and the White Aryan Resistance are dedicated to a melding of the far right and the far left. The movement takes the racism of the far right nativist movements and the economic arguments of the far left as it calls for an upheaval by the white working class (Wyatt Kaldenberg, 1988). By doing so, the movement appeals to both extremes of the spectrum, but it gains even more violent antipathy because it concurrently offends both extremes. Rather than religious and racist arguments commonly associated with Christian Identity and others in the radical right, Metzger uses economic arguments combined with racist views to build his organization.

The purpose of this paper is to describe Metzger's (and his supporters) media theories, their attempts to gain access to the media, the resistance to allowing them access, and the implications of denying the radical right access to the media.

Tom Metzger typifies the "paranoid style" of politics. Hofstadter (1969) argues that the "paranoid style" believes that "history is a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power. . . (p. 29)." This conflict between the person and the conspiracy is not something to be mediated or

compromised, but is a fight between good and evil and demands a willingness to fight the battle to the finish. The paranoid style believes that "decisive events are not taken as part of the stream of history, but as the consequences of someone's will (p. 32)." Furthermore, the "enemy is held to possess some especially effective source of power: he controls the press; he directs the public mind through 'managed news' (p. 32)." To Metzger and the White Aryan Resistance, it is a Jewish conspiracy which controls institutions (including the media) worldwide.

Metzger uses videotapes as one of the methods of of bringing his racist and conspiratorial message to his audience. "Race and Reason", his long-running show dedicated to the purity of the white race, began as a tribute to Carleton Putnam, the author of a book by the same name who stood against the civil rights movement in the 1960's. Metzger currently has over 100 videotapes that can be sold, borrowed, or preferably, placed on public access cable television. They claim to have "Race and Reason" on over 50 cable networks with potential access to millions of people. Metzger, the host, began production in July, 1984 with primitive techniques and borrowed equipment. They acquired more

sophisticated equipment and now the program has the look of a good, solid, although still amateur interview show.

Tom Metzger wants to exercise his First Amendment rights. He says, "'Race and Reason' is dedicated to free speech, it is a small island of free speech in a sea of controlled news." He further states that he produces the program because 1) commercial television doesn't promote the ideas and values that he wants to express; 2) "even when you do get on tv," he says, "it's a constant battle to try to get your story straight;" 3) he believes that they need a medium, a tv show, to give his ideas directly to the viewers; 4) he wants to get people on the show that aren't able to get on commercial tv; and 5) he wants to be able to broadcast with "no holds barred" and without advertisers telling him what to do (History of the Show, 1988).

While Tuckman (1978) argued that women were "symbolically annihilated" (i.e., either absent or trivialized in the media), Metzger makes the same argument about his nativist ideas. He argues that he cannot get access because twenty-six corporations control all the media (Kaldenberg, 1988); that the

Jewish conspiracy controls ABC, CBS, and NBC; and he can't buy time to put "Race and Reason on the main channels or even buy advertising for the program ("Klansas" City Cable, 1988). Furthermore, when he does get access to the media, his ideas are trivialized, especially on network television. On national television, he receives negative attention and cannot find a place where his ideas can be considered in a calm setting. Metzger complains that he constantly has people bringing up trivial issues like crosses burning on someone's lawn. This symbolic annihilation, according to Metzger, does not fulfill the promise of free speech.

To Metzger and his supporters, access to the media translates into control of the listeners. Johnson (1975) argues that cabalists, those that subscribe to the paranoid style of politics, view communication as control. She believes that the conspiracy theorists do not subscribe to the pragmatic view (the view of Bitzer and Burke) which

> presupposes that communication involves the activity of two decision-makers--the communicator and the respondent. The communicator will decide his or her communicative strategies hoping to

> influence the character of information pertinent to the respondent's formulation of a decision. . . . To alter the world through communication necessarily becomes a two-step process involving successive changes in rhetors and respondents; consequences are necessarily problematic because the respondent's choices are not predetermined (p. 90).

On the other hand, the conception of communication as control becomes a

> one-step, deterministic process. . . . The mechanical metaphors such as 'machines for spreading propaganda' express this image of communication as one-way control . . . . The process is deterministic because respondents have no choice (p. 90).

Consistent with the view of communication as control, Metzger argues that whoever controls the media, controls the minds of the people.

If they could gain access to the media, the racialists believe, they could "expose" those that fight them. Dennis Mahon, a KKK supporter of Metzger's, argues that "they" (the members of the conspiracy) are afraid of "Race and Reason" because it

will "expose" the banks, "expose" the income tax, and "expose" the fat cats. To "expose" implies that all one needs to do is to show problems to the public and they will recognize and accept them. Metzger believes that "they" are afraid that the show will change the political system when the "thousands and thousands of people who agree" with the racialist views are able to hear those ideas via the mass media ("Klansas" City Cable, 1988). Metzger and his followers talk about control, rather than persuading through the media.

Metzger produces the "Race and Reason" programs, but others must sponsor them in order to place them on local public access cable television channels. According to Metzger, these sponsors have received severe pressure to deter their efforts. He says that they have received slashed tires, telephone threats, and even visits to employers to intimidate the sponsor. He said that one church even pressured a man's wife to divorce him for his racialist ideas and sponsorship of "Race and Reason" (History of the Show, 1986).

If individual harassment doesn't stop sponsors from placing "Race and Reason" on public access channels, Metzger states that the authorities will use other ways to try to stop them. Among those methods

are 1) to put "Race and Reason" at the end of a "super long" list of programs that the cable company "suddenly" has; 2) to show the program in the "wee hours" of the morning; 3) to exclude "Race and Reason" from the published listing of the programs, ("they will put in all the shows that are on cable," Metzger states, "but they won't put ours on"); and 4) to forget the program; "sometimes it won't appear because, oh, somebody made a mistake (History of the Show, 1986)." Gaining a voice in the media is not easy for Metzger.

Turk (1982), as well as Metzger, identify the attempts to dissuade the sponsors as political repression. When people resist the authorities, as do Metzger and the White Aryan Resistance, there are political repercussions ("political criminalization" according to Turk). Political criminalization refers to "all forms and degrees of punitive attention given to resisters by authorities, with reference to whether such attention is direct or indirect, legal or extralegal, mild or severe. . . . political criminalization is viewed simply as the treatment accorded people who in fact resist political authority (Turk, 1982, p. 82)."

Metzger also faces severe reactions because the

production and message of "Race and Reason" is calculated, produced for the lower class, and is relatively well organized. Turk (1982) argues that, in general, "direct, extralegal, severe methods are most likely to be used when resistance is violent and/or calculated and when resisters are lower class and/or organized (p. 113)."

James Allen Moran, grand wizard of the Missouri Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, applied to place "Race and Reason" on the public access channel in Kansas City, the cable company responded by refusing to schedule the program. Even though the company had permitted other programs that were not locally produced, they argued that there were so many requests for broadcast time that they could only show locally produced programs. Therefore, they would not accept "Race and Reason".

Moran then agreed to produce shows locally and applied for training from the cable company in spite of his unhappiness with the decision. By the terms of their franchise, the cable company was required to provide training and facilities for people who wanted to produce public access channel programs. Moran and his group planned to produce a show called "American

Cultural Comment" with the same goals as "Race and Reason", but with local production facilities.

But the cable company refused to schedule Moran's training because the production facilities were in a black section of town. The company said that they were afraid of the violence that the KKK's presence might provoke. Moran, probably with his tongue firmly pressed in his cheek, offered to bring his own people to prevent violence if the police couldn't protect citizens in Kansas City. The offer was not warmly received.

By May, 1988 a plan was devised to change the franchise agreement between the cable company and the city council. The company would be allowed to change the public access channel into a community access channel. Since the inception of cable television several channels have been designated for community use. Those channels that are designated "public access" channels are guided by First and Fourteenth Amendment rights. The channels designated as "community access" are guided by the decisions of the cable owners. Community access channels allow owners to censor programs while public access channels do not. The proposal to change the public access channel into a

community access channel was adopted by the Kansas City Council in July.

With its newly found ability to deny access to extremist programs, the cable firm reaffirmed their rejection of the Missouri Knights bid to produce its own show. But the firm said that the Missouri Knights representatives could appear on two existing talk shows. Essentially, this plan would not allow the KKK to create its own message, but it could have its message included and mediated by other talk show hosts on existing formats. This was the same trivialization problem that originally led Metzger to create "Race and Reason".

In January, 1989, a year and a half after Moran first applied for the program, the Klan, with the assistance of the ACLU, sued the Kansas City Council council to prevent the public access channel from becoming a community access channel. The Missouri Knights suit argued that the change from public access channel to community access channels violated First and Fourteenth Amendment rights to free speech because it was intended to suppress the "racialist" KKK viewpoints; 2) the cable company "is constitutionally obligated to require the franchise to create and

operate at least one public access channel" since the city created a cable monopoly; 3) the change did not eliminate public access, but only gave the cable franchise the authority to censor it; and 4) the change violated the cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 which provides that the cable company may not exercise editorial control over the public access channel (Complaint, 1989).

While arguing that Kansas City must have a public access channel, the Missouri Knights suit identifies some of the differences between the responsibilities for public access between the print and cable mediums. First, they argue that while the print and broadcasting media communicate their thoughts to an audience, the cable system relays, but does not create, information. This means that the cable system is neither a speaker nor a listener but is a conduit which enjoys fewer rights than a communicator. Second, the presence of state action to help lay cable and receive rights-of-way separates cable from print media. Third, "the government does not protect a newspaper from competition, while the opposite is true for cable. Fourth, "if a citizen is denied access to a monopoly cable system, that person is frozen out of that medium,

while if someone is denied access even to a town's only newspaper, other forms of expression `in that same medium'" remain available. Finally, they argued that the print media have not had government control while cable operations have always had "substantial government regulation and licensing (Plaintiff's Brief, pp. 31-33)."

On the basis of these arguments, in June, 1989 the judge denied the city's motion to dismiss the case and the city council's lawyers became pessimistic about their legal grounds for eliminating the channel. A month later, the Council reversed itself and reinstated the public access channel and kept the community programming channel. But the battle was still not over. In September, 1989, an advisory committee for the reinstated public access channel announced a new format for the channel. The new rules allowed any participant to speak on any subject for 15 minutes in a soapbox format. Moran produced eight 15 minute shows by January, 1990 but was told by the cable company that these programs didn't meet the new rules. Moran suggested that if they didn't schedule these shows, they would bring Tom Metzger, Richard Butler and racialists to town and create more commotion by having

them appear personally. As of today, the fight to gain access to the media and the resistance to that access in Kansas City has not yet reached a conclusion.

One of the arguments against censorship is that the assertion that "democratic states are not really free . . . gain added credibility if the freedom" of expression is hindered (Schmidt and deGraf, 1982 p. 172). To hinder the racialists freedom of expression is to allow them to support their argument that a conspiracy which controls the media exists.

Dennis Mahon says that if they don't get their programs on public access television, "it will prove that the white man can't speak any more." Then, he says, the white people will get fed up and come out and do violence ("Klansas" City Cable, 1988). When J. Allen Moran's advertisement for the National Association for the Advancement of White People was rejected by the Kansas City Star, those people (on the radical right) became my people. Moran says so often, "When you take away a man's words and his mouth, he replaces them with guns and bullets (Norton, 1988, p. 16)." The successful repression of expression then is used by the radical right to solidify support and justify violence.

The complexity of the fight and the fighters makes

declaring winners and losers in the battle for media access difficult. Winning and losing depends upon whether the prize is the internal or the external audience. To deny media access, is to deny access to an external public. If that is the goal, then those who suppress Metzger's message win. However, the denial of media access to the radical right may be used internally to intensify their belief that a conspiracy controls the media. On the other hand, if Metzger's opponents are not successful, he gains access to a wider audience but then Metzgers argument about an all-powerful conspiracy is damaged.

In summary, there are several implications of the communication views of the radical right.

1. The radical right needs the attempts to limit its access to the media to prove its contention that a conspiracy controls the media. Nationwide and even worldwide attempts to reduce or eliminate their access to the media are used as proof that a broad conspiracy, interdependent with local complaints, exists.

2. The radical right needs to complain that they are symbolically annihilated in order to justify their small following. They can reason that a) if the media controls the people and b) if the conspiracy controls

the media, then c) the radical right's views cannot be heard and d) they will not be followed by large numbers of people.

3. The radical right needs attempts to limit their access to the media in order to justify their use or threatened use of violence. The radical right knows the First Amendment and subscribes to the proposition that the exercise of freedom of speech will serve as a substitute for violence. Therefore, resistance to the exercise of their First Amendment rights helps them justify violence.

These conclusions lead to the following hypothesis: The radical right will continue to push the limits of freedom of speech in order to provoke some resistance. This resistance will then generate rhetoric which will a) prove the radical right's contention of the existence of a conspiracy; b) justify the small number of adherents to the radical right's ideas; and c) legitimize the radical right's preparation for violence as well as their threats and actual use of violence.

The radical right and their opponents do face a dilemma. By winning access to the media, they gain access to the public but they lose the credibility of

their conspiracy arguments. By losing, they win the credibility of their arguments, but lose the external audience. Whatever the result, whether it is media access or media denial, the radical right can use the results as support for their arguments.

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